
STATEMENT BY
JEANEEN G. SUMMERS
PRESIDENT
AMERICAN FEDERATION OF EMPLOYEES LOCAL 1631, AFL-CIO
BEFORE
THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS CARES COMMISSION
REGARDING
THE VISN 10 CENTRAL MARKET CARES PLAN
ON AUGUST 19, 2003

As local union President, National VA Council Liaison for VISN 10, Medical Center employee, and veteran of the United States Air Force, I have a unique opportunity to view the CARES process from many perspectives.

I am actively involved in the CARES process in VISN 10. I have been more keenly involved in the Central and Eastern Market as those plans were once dependent upon each other. The initial plan involved closing Brecksville, moving 120 domiciliary beds to Chillicothe, and then constructing a new facility near Wade Park. The plan has now been changed so that the domiciliary beds would be outsourced in the Cleveland area with Chillicothe receiving none of the beds, however none of the changes appear in the Central Market CARES Plan. With this change, the CARES process will underutilize Chillicothe. I believe that our medical center has much more to offer than we are being allowed to contribute. This has been very disappointing to me. I urge the Central Market to look at opportunities to enhance Domiciliary services in Central Ohio by better utilizing existing/future vacant space in Chillicothe.

I met with five Congressional Offices as well as the Ross County Veterans Service Commission to garner buy-in on the plan for the Central and Eastern Markets—specifically the movement of the domiciliary beds to Chillicothe and construction of a new facility in Cleveland. All were supportive.

We are a major employer in southern Ohio, a pro-active partner with a historic bond to the community, and we have a significant economic impact on that community. We have actively pursued a long-term space plan prior to the CARES process. Many of our patients travel long distances to seek medical care at Chillicothe only to be referred to a larger VA for medical specialties. In

implementing this space plan, Chillicothe will have 126,210 square feet of vacant space that certainly could be utilized to open programs or provide medical specialties that are not currently available to our veterans in southern Ohio. Any plans to improve Medical Specialty Services in the Central Market should include enhancement of those same services in Chillicothe, since the patients at Chillicothe drive just as far for those services as do the patients in the Columbus area.

With the announcement of the new facility in Columbus, the staff at the Chillicothe VA has expressed deep concern over the future of the Chillicothe VA. I urge the Commission, in all their decisions, to keep in mind that the lives of many dedicated employees will be affected by your decisions.

I also would like to point out that the employees at our medical centers in VISN 10 are a very dedicated staff and many have dedicated their entire careers to improve healthcare for our veterans. I urge the Commission to provide that none of our employees lose their jobs through the CARES process. I urge the Commission to recommend that we re-train any displaced employees to utilize them in new programs that may be introduced through this process.

In closing, I passionately believe in the mission of the VA and hope that through this process, we will only improve service and access for our veterans. The CARES process should not close programs and move services that would cause further hardships on our veterans.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Commission. I look forward to answering any questions from you.